



## Mapping the Inequality and Exclusion of Dalitholics<sup>1</sup> in Bama's Autobiography 'Karukku'

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### **Abstract:**

The exclusion, inequality, humiliation and deprivation of Dalitholics in the caste-ridden Indian society are all pervasive. Dalits irrespective of their religious beliefs and locations undergo same atrocious treatment which has been more or less a static practice for centuries under the cover of religion. Conversion to other religions, an attempt to escape the casteist oppression by Dalits, does not unmark their stigma of being untouchable, cease their exploitation and exclusion rather it doubles their exploitation. Thus this paper aims to explore the exclusion and discrimination of neo-converts in Christianity and equally in Indian society. It attempts to uncover the degrees of discrimination and deprivation Dalits undergo in society, institutions and even during disbursement of services/facilities. It also reveals the reality of the Christianity catch line 'equality-fraternity-justice.' It attempts to find out whether Christianity in India is caste free or caste-ridden reading Bama's autobiography that underscores the life of Dalit Christians in Christian convent, Church and religious fold. The analysis reveals the casteist oppression and exclusion, religious suppression and domination over Dalits is quite common in society. Dalitholics are victim of casteist oppression and exclusion in Hindu as well as in Christianity

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<sup>1</sup> The term is coined by me with the coinage of two words Dalit+Catholics. The usage of term Dalit goes back to the nineteenth century, when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule (1826-1890), used it to describe the Outcastes and Untouchables as the oppressed and the broken victims of caste-ridden society. It was later used in 1958 in First Literary Conference for untouchables in Bombay but it came into prominence in 1972 with the evolution of Dalit Panther, a very revolutionary group founded by Namdeo Dhasal for Dalit rights. The word 'Dalit' etymologically has its root in Sanskrit word 'Dal' which mean crushed, ground, and broken for the ex-untouchables of India and Catholics in Christianity. Thus the term stands for Catholics who are Dalits. However it is pertinent to mention that Christianity fundamentally has no caste system but in India in Christianity practice of caste is quite common. Therefore, this term is coined in this backdrop. The term Dalit and Dalitholics are used interchangeably in this study.

society. It discloses exclusion of single Dalit Christian woman in caste, class and gendered society.

**Keywords:** *Inequality, Exclusion, Discrimination, Dalits, Catholics, Church, Convent and Hindu*

**Introduction:**

Not only from womb to tomb, but even after one's death caste follows and segregates - even in the graves. —**Bama**

In India, caste centres certain groups of people and cast out the others. All these cast out groups which once were designated as impure or untouchable by caste ideology are marginalized, exploited and excluded on the axis of caste. Such exploitation still continues and even death proves helpless to free them from the pain of untouchability consequent to separate cremation grounds alike the habitation according to caste hierarchy. Since Hindu religion bases its philosophy in caste some people to escape the sting of untouchability convert to other religions that propagate the theory of equality and fraternity i.e. Christianity. But does conversion really proves a home or not still remain an important question. Therefore, this paper attempts to map the treatment of Dalitholics. How they are treated after conversion by Hindu as well as Christian society. Is there any difference in the exploitation? Are they inclusive in the Christian society or still remain exclusive? Is Christianity caste-free or caste ridden? And what does an unweeded Dalit has for survived in casteist society? These are some questions which will be answered through this study.

**Methodology:**

To map the conditions of Dalit converts in Christianity if they are treated equal or not; they are inclusive in Christian society or not: Christianity is caste-free or caste-ridden; issue of means of survival for Dalits and an unweeded Dalit women particularly, this study is focused on Bama's (2012) autobiography *Karukku* in addition to the other sources. Since autobiography is subjective and verifiable; no other source can be as authentic for study as it is. Therefore, to study the undertaken text the post colonial theory, Marxism and Dalit Feminist Criticism are used as a tool for analysis.

**Discussion:**

Valmiki (2007) propounds through his life experiences in *Joothan* that "caste follows one right up to one death" (p. 78). Likewise other writers and scholar endorses Valmiki's conception of caste. Kamble who published her autobiography *Jeena Amucha* (1981) in Marathi and got translated with title *The Prisons We Broke* (2003) portrays the caste discrimination and

atrocities in pre-Ambedkarite period. Pawar (2003) who was a working woman and an activist too argues that in her autobiography *Aaydan* (2003) in Marathi and translated version in English *The Weave of My Life* (2008) that in face development and a little bit progress of Dalits due to constitutional measures “Like wild animals fast disappearing from the woods, caste seems to have ‘disappeared’. Yet like a wild animal hiding behind a bush, it remains hidden, poised for attack. People travelling in fast vehicles may not notice the wild eyes looking at them. But those who walk do and are struck with terror” (p. xii). Similar to Pawar (2008) and Kabmle (2003), Pawde (1981) theorises that “What comes by birth but can't be cast off by dying—that is caste” (p. 112).

But Bama (2012) rejects his understanding regarding continuance of caste in Indian. She argues that “Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear. Wherever you look, however much you study, whatever, you take up, caste discrimination stalks us in every nook and corner and drives us into a frenzy” (p. 26). She uncovers the reality of caste. She contends that caste is like the ghost that stalks you everywhere irrespective of one's education, position, status etc. and still remains invisible.

The statement of Bama underscores the caste dynamics in Indian society. Most of the testimonies are of Hindu or Buddhist contenders. Therefore, Christianity remains undercover regarding caste practices. The basic and widely held assumption that Christianity does not practise casteism seems false as all Dalit Christians suffer in churches, convents and society. It is evident from the letter written by M. Mary John, president of the Dalit Christian Liberation Movement, to Pope John Paul II during his visit to India in 1999 which speaks volumes about the treatment meted out to Dalit Christians within the churches of India. Dalits are oppressed and persecuted by "the hierarchy, the congregation, the authorities and the institutions of the Catholic Church" Vedantam (2002, n.d., para. 2) quotes. Chidambaram report (1975) attests the debate that the casteism is practised widely among the members of Christian fold. Adding to it, Geetha (2011) in an article uncovers the paradoxical existence of Dalit-Christians caught in the “caste structures of Hinduism despite their conversion to Christianity” (p. 323).

Thus Dalit-Christians are exploited equally in both societies Hindu and Christian. This exploitation forces Bama (2012) to underscore how the caste practices negate age, class and gender. The greatest asset for mainstream society is their higher caste where as low caste status for Dalits is irreparable damage. It is evident in Bama's grandmother Phatti's respectful address to even little Naicker<sup>2</sup> child as “‘Ayya, Master,’ and runs about to do follow

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<sup>2</sup> A landowning caste, the dominant caste community in Bama's village

his orders” (2012, p. 17) while “tiny children, born the other day, would call her by her name and order her about” (2012, p. 16). Contrarily, Dalit children’s talk to upper caste people with self-pride, without bowing before them, is enough to make upper caste people furious which results in their talk to Dalit elders in arrogance. This caste superiority is visible at work place also owing to their deprivation which forces them to work in the farms and homes of upper castes.

Bama (2012) attacks scathingly on the hypocrisy of upper caste people. She mentions how a Naicker, seated on a piece of sacking spread over a stone ledge while “our people were hard at work, driving cattle in pairs, round and round to tread out the grain from the straw” (p. 14) does not mind Dalits’ touch in grain treading. But Bama surprises to see her elder “holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. . . . extended the packet towards him [Naicker], cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand” (p. 15). She struggles hard relate these two incidents but failed till she attended the third standard. Bama (2012) articulates, “I hadn’t yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is” (p. 13).

The exclusion is prevalent not only at private and unorganised spaces but even in the establishment of government organizations—irrespective of operating authority—government, NGOs, or any other institution such as Christian community schools. The apparent spatial exclusion occurs as all such institutions are established in dominant section’s locality. To access any service i.e. post and education Dalits have to cross the mainstream localities/lanes which is very troublesome. This spatial exclusion from facility centres is a modern practice of exclusion by caste people that excludes Dalits to access these facilities as Whites’ practise(d) against Blacks in America. The attempt to bridge this spatial gap offers no relief as public servants are as casteist in public institutions as they are in society. The upper caste school teachers, for example, intentionally remind Dalits’ of their low caste status. It is perceptible as class teacher or the PT Teacher of Bama would ask all untouchable children to stand up without reason, either at assembly or during lessons when Dalit students are surrounded by upper caste students. Bama (2012) mentions “They’d write down our name, and then ask us to sit down again” (p. 21).

The teachers by these practices explicitly imprint the caste status on the mind of upper caste and Dalits students. Moreover, the teachers punished Dalit students severely, as *Manusmriti* dictates, for minor childish mistakes. Headmaster [from Chaaliyar caste] says, Bama (2012) narrates, “You have

shown your true nature as a Paraya<sup>3</sup>. You climbed the coconut tree yesterday after everybody else had gone home, and you stole a coconut. We cannot allow you inside this school. . . . He abused me [Bama] roundly, using every bad word that came to his mouth” (P. 19). This repeated caste violence is an attempt to fulfill their caste ego. Besides, the Christian teachers also perceive Dalit students in Brahmanic view as the issue of date of birth marked differently on her the birth certificate and degrees certificates surfaces in his memories. However, the date of birth on the both the certificate were registered by the officials all upper caste not by Bama herself nevertheless Sister supervisor of her B.Ed training shouted deliberately, “You Tamil people want to get admission into schools under false pretences, changing the dates on your birth certificates” (Bama, 2012, p. 24). Both these episodes reveal the casteist attitude of teachers irrespective of their religion and caste discrimination Dalits Christians face in Hindu society as well as Christian communities. Moreover the latter incident divulges the deep-rooted regionalism too.

The notion of purity-pollution exists as deep in Christianity as it does in Hindu religion. Conversion to other religions in India transfers the converts' caste also. The conversion of Dalits means conversion of bodies only; not of caste. Thus Christianity is altogether same as Hinduism. Bama (2012) highlights that Dalits who did menial jobs were “. . . abused all the time and treated in a shameful and degrading way. . . . even older people trembling, shrinking like small children, frightened by the power and wealth that the Sisters had . . .” (p. 26). The pain of discrimination forces Sothipillai to shout angrily “just look at what goes on in our church as well. It is our women who sweep the church and keep it clean. Even in front of God the Dalit female becomes marginalized” (Bama, 2005, p. 23). This act reveals the selfish use of God also. No God discriminate anyone on any axis but the society does it right before and in name of God. This proves that God is used as a tool to scare the underprivileged.

At one hand, nuns kept humiliating Dalits in Convents and Churches, and on the other, they spared no chance to please wealthy students for whom the

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<sup>3</sup> Paraya, Paraiyar or Parayar (formerly anglicised as Pariah and Parea) is a caste group found in the Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They are also known as Adi Dravida ("Original Dravidian"), which was a title encouraged by the British Raj as a substitute for *Paraiyar* because the British believed that their colonising of the country had ended slavery in India. It is supposed that the name of the community has been derived from the Tamil word *parai* ("drum"). According to this hypothesis, the Paraiyars were originally a community of drummers who performed during flood time, war and auspicious events like festivals, weddings and also funerals. As their population increased, they were forced to take up occupations that were considered unclean, such as burial of corpses and scavenging. Subsequently, they came to be considered as an untouchable caste.

school was fun otherwise cultural consciousness they carry right from the beginning; from their homes. They would say, “We don’t want to sit next to those ones [Dalit students], they are dark-skinned, they are poor, they are ugly, they don’t wear nice clothes, even in a play or dance performance the rich children didn’t want to put on the costume of the poor” (Bama, 2012, p. 112). This attitude of rich students manifests casteist cultural in practice. These cultural values are so deep rooted that no school can undo these. Attacking on schools and education system, Bourdieu (1997, as cited in Singh, 2019) in his social reproduction theory argues that schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms of perpetuating social inequalities. Moreover teacher education is also unable to train the teachers who are unable to prepare students for questioning the exploitative structures.

Educational opportunities given to Dalits in Christianity are not practices of equality rather pretensions to be egalitarian. Bama (2012) articulates that as a token of gesture convent schools admit four or five poor children or else these nuns don’t even care to glance. The nuns spoke very insultingly and don’t even “consider low people as human beings” (Bama, 2012, p. 25). They used to say, “How can we allow these people [Dalit Christians] to come into our houses? In any case, even if we allow them, they would not enter our homes. They themselves know their place” (Bama, 2012, p. 115). Guru (2008) argues that “internalization of the ideology of purity-pollution compels Dalits to keep their body folded, fearful of touching the upper caste and thus polluting the sacred body” (p. 165). Besides, nuns think that helping Dalit students “would be like helping cobras” (Bama, 2012, p. 115). The indifferent attitude evidences the reluctance of mainstream people to teach, train, and support Dalits. This casteist attitude irreversibly maintains inequality in society by foul practices. Finding Dalits in good dresses the nuns would say, “you can’t even make out who they are, sometimes” (Bama, 2012, p. 115). The statement reveals that Dalits must be easily identified so as to upper caste society devises plans to segregate and control them. Since modernity blurs the caste boundaries, upper caste society always remains anti-modernist with relation to caste. Besides, colonial mentality of mainstream people perceives government policies as doles as if it is given from their own pockets.

Thus, discriminatory practices prevalent into Convents affect not only poor and illiterate Dalit but also those who are equal in terms of education, designation and skills. Bama discloses the apathetic behaviour towards her when no Sister talked to her whereas they talked amongst themselves. The Sisters in the Convent always remain in search of the contexts to humiliate and torture Dalits. The Mother Superior just showered instruction nothing

else. How painful it is to live alone in isolation, like a patient of consumption, segregation even after equal education, equal designation, and equal status administratively. It is visible in her transfer from school one after the other and lastly to Jammu. Besides, reversal of her appointment as Head Teacher is a sheer case of discrimination and exclusion. It was Councillor Sister Marian who didn't want her as she doesn't like Tamizh<sup>4</sup> nuns which is why she had argued ardently on the issue of junior sister [Bama] being appointed as Head Teacher overlooking her ten years of teaching experience.

Thus Bama underlines caste divisions, class, and linguistic divisions prevalent in convents. Sister Rita's selection to study medical sciences to become a doctor was purely based on favoritism as Rita was "related to Marian. Although, Sister Edna had higher marks than Rita" (Bama, 2012, p. 124). Negligence of merit, turn and qualification to bypass a Dalit is quite normal in India if a Dalit happens to be promoted on turn. The rules and traditions are violated only when a Dalit has to acquire a position as it has happened in case of appointment of the Chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), breaking away from the tradition of appointing the chief from the serving members of the Commission (The Indian Express, n.d.). According to past practice, the senior most serving member is appointed as Chairperson of UPSC; but this time, instead of senior member Alka Sirohi, a Dalit, Deepak Gupta, an outsider, was appointed.

In the same matter in 2014 Hindustan Times reported, "The Centre had for the first time appointed somebody (Gupta) from outside as the UPSC chairman. At that time, Sirohi was the senior most member and could have been the chairman" (n.d.). However it is mandatory to mention that upon superannuation of Deepak Gupta Alka Sirohi was appointed as Chairperson but temporarily till a permanent Chairperson is appointed. Likewise, in Modi Government there is not a single Scheduled Caste officer among India's top ranking bureaucrats—the 149 'secretaries' to the government of India (Verma, 2012, n.d.). It proves that the prevalence of caste-based exclusion everywhere in India irrespective of religion, profession, and place. Christian convents and churches; priests and teachers; nuns and neighborhood equally discriminate and exclude Dalits. Eventually this forces Bama to escape and articulate about such a heinous practice. Vaneigem (2006) regarding role of *dharma-gurus* [priests] argues that "Judeo-Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, the various sects and their cohorts of rabbis, parish priests, Imams,

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<sup>4</sup> Tamil speaking people

pastors, gurus, bonzes and lamas, are the last avatars of two thousand years of exploitation of man by man” (n.d.).

Bama (2012) exposes openly hypocrisy of Nuns, Sisters and Priests in convents and schools. Indeed, in Christianity there is a legacy of persons like “Voltaire who led a just fight against the intolerance of the priests and [yet] owned interests in a maritime company that traded in black slaves” (Vaneigem, 2006, n.d.). The fissure between Dalits and mainstream widens further when “Schools do not admit Dalit students, institutions do not appoint Dalits as teachers, the very Convent does not accept Dalit women as prospective nuns and there was even a separate order for them” (Bama, 2012, p. 25). Bama laments for deprivation of Dalits and indifferent attitude of mainstream. The warden Sister made fun of Dalits pointed out “Look at the Cheri children! When they stay here, they eat their fill and looks as round as potatoes. But look at the stage in which they come back from home—just skin and bone!” (Bama, 2012, p. 20). The humiliation Dalit students had/has to face even when they paid mess charges fully.

Even after constitutional safeguards, the caste-based discrimination continues irrespective of time and place. Thorat Committee (2007) found four doctors of All India Institute of Medical Sciences guilty for failing Dalit students deliberately in exams. The Suicide of Dalit students like Rohit Vemula is recent testimony of differential attitude of mainstream official/teachers in institutes of higher learning. Moreover, the committee headed by Thorat found that the handful of SC/ST employees in such institution also face discrimination and exclusion. If they fail deliberately Dalit student; would they appoint them as teacher. Of course not, which is why even after Bama’s long teaching experience in convent, and long interview and written exam she was told that the job would fetch her salary of four hundred rupees a month which is too meager to survive. She describes painfully, “I didn’t get that job. Why? Because I am a Dalit. It was a school that is governed and run by the Nadar<sup>5</sup>. It seems they only appoint Nadar women” (Bama, 2012, p. 118). In most of the cases, the government aided institutions devise strategies to exclude Dalits.

Contrary to it, these institutions colonize the bodies of nuns and converts. She lays bare the practice of colonization by the convent when she decided to leave the convent. But would the authorities let one go who has more than

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<sup>5</sup> The Nadar community was not a single caste, but developed from an assortment of related subcastes and classes of different origins, which in course of time, came under the single banner Nadar. Nadars are predominant in the south Indian districts of Tuticorin, Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli and Virudhunagar. Nadar climber was the largest subset of today’s Nadar community.



ten years of teaching experience and asks no pay for the work one does? Of course not. Additionally, her departure would certainly raise questions on conventual culture which consequently would discourage the prospective nuns. The domination in the Christian institutions is pyramidal which vests more powers to those who are on the top and less or no power to those who are placed at the low as Ambedkar (1951) theorized. Bama stood at the lowest rung in the conventual hierarchy along the caste axis. This is why the administrators like Principal or Mother Superior would go to any extent to stop her leaving the convent. The local authorities tried to retain her travelling ticket and insisted her to see Provincial. But a kind sister revealed the colonial practices of the authorities to house arrest the nuns. The sister unwraps that “If people like you get caught, you’ll just have to stay” (Bama, 2012, p. 128).

This is the way convents treat poor, helpless Christian in order. This is easy to practise as Christian organisations maintain the record of its followers. It does not let inside reality out. No voice of protest, no heads that go against the prevalent system in the convents are seen; no Dalit— teacher or the taught, devotee or the saint gets deserved place. Actually, injustice dances like a demon in the convents and all other institutions that are run by these people. Nobody “who gets in the way of their own convenience is let off easily” Bama (2012) discloses (p. 106). Any how she succeeds to escape from the convent as she was not free in the caged world [convent] but to surprise the free world also proved a cage for a single Dalit woman. This world proved a mirage for her. Yet with all the pain and happiness in the depths her mind she had strength to get up, to live, and a desire to live as Munoo does in Mulk Raj Anand’s (1936) *Collie*.

The exclusion of Dalits continues even in the burial/cremation grounds. Since Dalitholics buried their dead in the ground next to Chaaliyar community school. “The upper caste Christians had their own cemetery elsewhere” (Bama, 2012, p. 29). It still continues even today in Hindu society. Lashkari and Dhagat (2016) reports as Shivnarayan Saurashtriya, resident of Shajapur in Madhya Pradesh, recently told, “Our people have been denied permission to use the crematorium” (para. 7). Therefore, they had to cremate the dead in open. It continues in Christianity because, Bugge (1994) argues, “Robert de Nobile<sup>6</sup> continues to encourage Hindu practices . . . This included searing of sacred ash or sandalwood paste on forehead and the use of Brahmanical sacred thread. It also included building of separate Churches for Brahmin converts and Pallava converts” (p. 44).

To mobilize mass to convert, Christian missionaries first converted Hindu Brahmin to establish role model. Gomes (1987) argues that “The first mass conversions took place among the Brahmins of Divar, and the Kshatriyas of Carambolim” (p. 64). In this regard, Boxer (1969) contends that “The converted Brahmenes retained their pride of caste and race, and they very seldom intermarried with the Portuguese and never with their Indian social inferiors. Similarly, the lower castes who became Christians did not lose their ingrained respect for the Brahmenes, and they continued to venerate the latter as if they were still their 'twice-born' [*dvija*] and natural superiors” (p. 254). Fuller (1976) also points out in his study ‘Kerala Christians and Caste System’ the currency of caste in Christianity. He argues that, “in spite of the theological differences between Syrian Christians and Hindus in Kerala, ordinary people from both these groups share a common ideological conceptualization of caste” (Fuller, 1976, p. 66).

Bama (2012) baffles with the idea of separate settlements in Hindu as well as Christian orders. She underlines that, “They kept themselves to their part of the village and we stayed in ours. We only went to their side if we had the work to do there” (Bama, 2012, p. 7). This reminds the argument hooks (2000) makes in her book *Marginality to centrality* regarding the problem of Black in America. She aggrieves, “We could enter that world, but we could not live there. But they [Whites] never ever came to our parts” (hooks, 2000, p. xvi). Bama registers successfully the pain of exclusion and inequality of Dalitholics in the churches and convents. Evidently, Pillai Commission (1965) verifies it in its report that the degrees of segregation of new converts from scheduled caste is almost as high as before his conversion.

In addition to social exclusion Bama (2012) highlights the deprivation. She argues painfully that “Life is difficult if you happen to be poor, even though you are born into upper castes. . . . the Paraya community, as the poorest of the poor struggling for daily survival, doesn’t need spelling out” (Bama, 2012, p. 79). To maintain their domination over Dalits, dominant castes control all resources so as to enslave them forever. The economic control by upper caste forces Dalits to struggle hard even for daily bread. Bama gives a vivid description of her grandmother struggle:

Paatti was a true and proper servant. She worked as a labourer to a Naicker family, but she was also a Kotthaal<sup>7</sup> . . . She rises before cock-crow at two or three in the morning, draw water, see to the household

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<sup>7</sup> One who hires the labourers for landlord, brings them to work regularly, supervise them, and make sure they receive their wages.

chores, walk a long distance to the Naicker's house, work till sunset, and then come home in the dark and cook a little gruel for herself. (Bama, 2012, p. 49)

Bama argues that even then Dalits never "receive appropriate payment for their labour" (2012, p. 54). Howsoever tough work they do. Bama (2012) finds her people at rest only when they fall asleep at night. They have to keep working until the moment of death. It is only in this way that "they can even half fill their bellies" (Bama, 2012, p. 55). They get the same *kuuzh* or broken-grain gruel every day. Though broken-grain gruel stinks so much but in absence of money, job, resources, broken-grain gruel is all that Bama's community could afford. This demonstrates that situations of Dalitholics are not different from that of other Dalits in India that Kamble (2003) and Pawar (2008) successfully represent. Where Baby Kamble's community had to go hungry for days or had to eat cactus seeds, Bama's community people have to depend on the seasons such as rains when the lakes be full and they could fish the cheaper the fish like *silebi* and the *kenda*.

If lake desiccates even these cheapest fish were not affordable for them. The hunger remains all the same in Dalit families even though one happens to be in govt. job. The women manage the houses somehow by picking up sundry jobs. Bama reveals the fight against starvation; consequent to economic inequality, as sometimes Dalitholics have wild greens leaves like *kupaikira* or *thoyilukkira*, thickened ragi dough and sometimes boiled drumsticks leaves to eat. The saga of their starvation is far and wide. Bama's father's govt. job could never bring 'good days' for the family. Except his presence, there would always be "nothing but *kuuzh*" (Bama, 2012, p. 71). During war times— China, Bangladesh, and Pakistan— when he could not send money, family could neither buy cheapest fish nor the broken grain for *kuuzh*. Inequality and exploitation spifflicate Dalit children's childhood. Though they are born child but they work as grown up since the day they walk on their own foot. Bama (2012) portrays the Dalitholics' childhood owing to the paucity of food and clothes, in these words:

When we girls grew up, there was no more play. We went to work during the day, came home and saw to the household chores; that was it. There was nothing else. Now even the little ones don't play anymore. Even the tiny ones wake up at cock-crow, go to the matchbox factory, and work there till sunset. (p. 58)

Bama (2012) raises the issue of Dalit children along the line of various constructions and situations that they face. She understands it through Marxian perspective that "they own neither property nor land nor even a decent house to live in. In such conditions they work, and only for good of

the rich. How can they even hope for luxuries” (p. 77)? She realizing the importance of education in bridging the economic gaps between mainstream and Dalits comments that if the children on her street acquired a little education and find jobs, then they too could live reasonably well, but she startles “how are they to educate themselves? The struggle to fill their bellies is their main struggle, after all” (Bama, 2012, p. 77). She circuitously questions Kailash Satyarthi’s understanding regarding child labour overlooking the caste. Moreover, the rescue of Dalit child labourers without rehabilitation is nothing but out of frying pan into the fire.

Running family is a collaborative assignment in India and among Dalits particularly. It is needless to mention that undoubtedly the struggle grown up do for family survival but children also do lots more such as collecting firewood otherwise the family would have to go without the gruel. In such poverty and depravation, Dalit girls, Bama (2012) reveals could not see “any sense in schooling, stay at home, collect firewood, look after the house, care for the babies, and do household chores” (p. 79). Bama lays emphasis that the firewood collection by girls is to earn some money to support the family. Girls/women collect the firewood, sweating all the way long, “laden with the bundle of bushy firewood women would come to the village and go direct to the ‘Naicker street and sell them for seven or eight rupees each” (Bama, 2012, p. 52). The depravation drives Dalits in state of depression and humiliation. The intensity of poverty forces them near to commit suicide. Bama had to close herself in toilets as she did not have a silk sari for the function.

The main problem at such occasions is that no upper caste woman lends her sari to Dalit woman and Dalit never own such costly sari. Bama uncovers truthfully that it because of social exclusion of Dalits, the mainstream women do not lend their sari to a Dalit woman and due to economic inequality Dalits never own such sari. Dalits are poor, Bama (2012) puts succinctly because:

Their hard work is exploited half the time by their employers. The rest of the time they are swindled by these tradesmen. So how can it be possible for them to make any progress? It seems that it is only the swindlers who manage to advance themselves. But there is no way at all for the Dalit who stick to fair methods, and who toils hard all her life, to make good. (53)

It is not only Dalitholics face exclusion and inequality only in social and economic affairs but they undergo the same in govt. office and agencies too. Even after being constitutionally equal, the law enforcement agencies exclude Dalits and deprive them of their rights. Police proves to be epitome

of legalized perpetrator of atrocities on Dalits. It in preponderance with upper caste generally excludes Dalits even when they are victim. Bama exposes true face of Indian Police. She mentions that once Chaaliyar community raised a quarrel and perpetrated atrocities on Dalits but later Chaaliyar, being well-off, gave bribe to police to go scot-free. The nepotist and corrupt police used obscene language and swore at Dalit women when their husbands were away and asked them to be “ready to entertain the police at night, winked at them, and shoved their guns against their bodies” (Bama, 2012, p. 40). Regarding the brutality police on underprivileged sections Nirula (as cited in Mayhell, 2003) argues that “there have been large-scale abuses by the police, acting in collusion with upper castes, including raids, beatings in custody, failure to charge offenders or investigate reported crimes” (n.d.).

Similarly, Arulraja (1996) describes a real case of police atrocities at Ponnur on 8 November 1992 when the Dalits were preparing to go to work in the fields; about three hundred policemen surrounded their hamlet and attacked them. People were dragged out of their houses and beaten up. “Not even pregnant women were spared. They were stamped upon with booted legs. The policemen thrust their cudgels into their vaginas. Looting, rape and destruction followed” (Arulraja, 1996, p. 7). Around forty persons suffered fracture of bones and fifteen persons head injuries. Many women suffered multiple injuries. This is the face of Indian police and its vow to rescue people. But it becomes the demon when they come across the underprivileged sections.

Besides, Bama underscores other administrators’ undignified treatment. She underlines treatment of an India Railways Ticket Examiner to a helpless poor woman on train with an unreserved birth. The ticket inspector gave first a violent kick with his boots to her suitcase that hurtled straight towards the toilet and stopped there, without any enquiry for the fine. Bama (2012) sarcastically mentions that then he “dragged me along there, as well. On top of this, he asked me to pay the excess fare.” (pp. 134-35). The attitude of TTE taught Bama that little money in your hands can gain you some authority, status, and prestige which Dalits do not have even after toiling hard. In addition to it, she discloses the corrupt ‘Guarder’ or ‘forester’ who collected four annas<sup>8</sup> for the illegal deforestation. These incidents uncover not only dereliction of duties by Govt. employees for some money but question the culture one brings up in. Thus the cultural practices in India are corrupt irrespective of religions.

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<sup>8</sup> An Anna was a currency unit formerly used in India, equal to 1/16 rupee

Most important issue of exclusion that Bama raises is of those Dalit women who have no job, no home, no father, no husband and no issue. They are alone, isolated, segregated and even alienated as Bama herself was after deserting the convent. She expresses her concern over the indifferent attitude of the family member to an unmarried woman only because of economic and social exclusion. The help a lonely self can expect from family is never possible in Dalit communities. Bama imagines that without a job, shelter and penny how she would survive. In such situations her family and relations were “sure to treat her ‘like a criminal’” (Bama, 2012, p. 130).

She attacks the andocentric, caste and class society that accepts the criminal-unmarried-sons but not circumstantial helpless unmarried girls. The task of finding a job is monstrously difficult for a Dalit woman without family support, long alienation from world, without money and low in caste hierarchy. On issue of job through advertisement, Bama (2012) profoundly asserts neither have “I the means to bribe my way into a job nor do I have anyone who can use his influence on my behalf” (p. 118). The authorities—nepotist, casteist, colonialist and even sadist—enjoy excluding the ‘others’ culturally, economically and socially.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus above discussion proves successfully the exclusion and inequality of Dalit Christians on axis of various social constructions. Dalitholics undergo the social and economic exclusion in Christianity for being Dalits and in Indian society for being Dalit Christians. They face exclusion, starvation and deprivation in society, institutions and Churches and Convents. It also strips off the catch-line of Christianity ‘equality-fraternity-justice’ and shows it in its nakedness. The domination of churches, convents, teachers, priests and nuns proves to be exclusionary along the axis of caste and class. The enforcement agencies or officers’ preponderance with the upper castes also blurs the hope of protection of Dalits by constitutional safeguards. Conversion does not help Dalits of the discrimination, exploitation, inequality and sufferance they undergo in society rather it proves to be a ‘*karukku*’. The caste people in positions irrespective of their religious faith are all hypocrite who devise strategy to keep Dalit(holics) slaves forever. The study proves Christianity in India is absolutely casteist resultantly Dalit Christian face as severe caste oppression as other Dalits face in Indian society.

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